

THE OBJECT AND IMPORTANCE OF MINISTERIAL EDUCATION

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"Doth our law judge any man before it hear him, and know what he doeth." - John 7:51.

These are the words of Nicodemus in the Jewish Sanhedrim. Uttered on a memorable occasion, they illustrate his candor and courage in rebuking the unjust proceedings of that body, for deciding without due inquiry against the claims of Jesus to be the promised Messiah and Saviour of the world. I take the general principle involved in his words, and apply it, not to the claims of the Saviour himself, (which are admitted by the hearers whom I address tonight,) but to one of the methods by which we seek to promote his cause. My wish is to remove unfounded prejudices against the mode of ministerial training now approved and generally adopted among us, as appropriate to the indications of Providence and the exigencies of our age.

Appearing before you in behalf of the Virginia Baptist Education Society, I shall endeavor, with as much simplicity as possible, to submit my views of the object of ministerial education, and the character of those means which are employed by this Society. I shall then, perhaps, add a few considerations tending to shew the importance of such education to one who, like the man after God's own heart, would serve his own generation by the will of God. Deny me not your sympathy and prayers.

I. The OBJECT at which we aim.

There is the most need of dwelling on this point, both that our own views may be adjusted to the scriptural standard, and that they may be clearly understood, where they greatly misconceived, or but dimly apprehended. Certain it is that there yet remain in the Christian community some who doubt the scriptural character of Education Societies. The causes of doubt are various. It may be that they have seen men who substituted learning in the place of piety, as an indispensable qualification for the ministry. It may be they have heard that these societies are designed to multiply ministers, by making ministers of those whom God has never called. Or, it may be they have known some cases in which the students of such institutions have conducted in a manner unbecoming their sacred profession and destination. Or, it may be

they indulge vague fears of the tendency of such institutions, as they loom large through the misty atmosphere of future years. And any one of these things, or all of them together, may have raised in their minds strong prejudices against these institutions, while ignorant of their real object and legitimate results.

To all such persons, (and among them are beloved brethren.) we say, as did Nicodemus to the alarmed and excited Sanhedrim, "Doth our law judge any man before it hear him, and know what he doeth?" Do you yourselves, in other cases, decide upon a man's character, till you ascertain the leading object of his life, and the means he employs to accomplish it? Let this society be judged on the same principles. First ascertain its real object, and compare this with the scriptural standard of ministerial qualification. This is the preliminary step, indispensable to a just judgment.

Now the object of our society is not, as the phrase is, to "make ministers." The thing intended by this phrase, we explicitly and emphatically disavow. It is out of our sphere. It is beyond our power. We fully concur in the views of the excellent Newton, that "none but He who made the world, can make a minister of the gospel." Without this fundamental maxim, we believe that we should stumble at the very threshold. It is indeed sufficiently easy to train up religious teachers of certain descriptions; but ministers of the gospel, really and sincerely such, must be made of God. We know of no divine prerogative more sacred than that of selecting the ministers of his mercy in reconciling a rebellious world.

While we avow this to be our solemn conviction, we are willing at the same time to explain how much we mean by it. We do not mean that they are supernaturally inspired and endowed, as were the apostles and prophets; who formed the first links in the golden chain of God's gracious communications to man. But the natural abilities specially requisite in the work of the ministry, we believe to be the special gifts of God. He also calls these gifted individuals by his grace, and endows them with that spirit of genuine piety which sanctifies every natural gift to his service and glory. He too moves them by his Holy Spirit to engage in the work of the ministry, in absolute preference to every other employment, however tempting, splendid, easy, or lucrative. He it is who opens the door for their entrance and usefulness, in answer to prayer, and according to the methods prescribed by his own infinite wisdom in his word. He it is, moreover, who, in his all-presiding providence, places before them the means of improvement in knowledge, and grace, and every ministerial qualification. And all these means he commands them to employ diligently, that their progressive profiting may appear unto all. And he it is, in fine, by whose blessing alone these manifold means are efficacious. "Not as though we were sufficient of ourselves, to think anything of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God, who also hath made us able ministers of the New Testament."

After this free statement of our views, I need hardly add that it is no part of our object to substitute learning in the place of piety; to give preference to sparkling over solid talent; to indulge indolence; to foster pride and ambition; to encourage effeminate and expensive habits; much less to teach the morality of expediency for that of the New Testament, or the cold philosophy of the schools for the warm, living, quickening truths of the great salvation. Neither

is it to fall in with the fashion of the age; or to rivet the falling chains of sectarian bigotry; or to train up a race of theological polemics, to disturb and disgrace by their angry controversies the peaceful precincts of the church of God.

But it is our object to receive such young men as the churches approve, and judge to be called of God to the work of the gospel ministry, though yet deficient in culture and in means; and to aid them to the utmost in acquiring such a degree of qualification as the word and providence of God demand. Nor is that measure small. We have taken some pains to draw forth from the scriptures a clear and comprehensive account of it.

There are, first of all, SPIRITUAL QUALIFICATIONS. They include —

1. Established and exemplary piety. It is the recorded will of the great Head of the church, that the piety of his ministers should have both a deeper root and a riper growth than that of ordinary Christians. One reason assigned for this is, because they are, by means of their elevated office, exposed to new forms and severer tests of temptation, such as must utterly overthrow minds not firmly settled and maturely exercised by Christian experience. Hence the cautions, "Lay hands suddenly on no man" — "Not a novice; lest being lifted up with pride, he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil." Another reason assigned is the eminent force of official character and example for good or evil. Hence the injunctions, "Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers in speech, in deportment, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity." Hence too, the earnest admonitions, "Flee youthful lusts; but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart." Hence the adoring acknowledgment, "I thank Jesus Christ, our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry." Hence the solemn adjuration, "Hold fast the form of sound words which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love, which is in Christ Jesus." "That good thing which is committed to thee, keep by the Holy Ghost which dwelleth in us." "I charge thee before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, and the elect angels, that thou observe these things, without preferring one before another, doing nothing by partiality." "And the things which thou hast heard of me before many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also." These are specimens of the style in which ministerial piety, as the foundation of ministerial faithfulness, is described and inculcated in the New Testament.

2. Unblemished character. '* If any be blameless," says Paul; "for a bishop (a pastor,) must be blameless as the steward of God." And this not only in the view of the church. "Moreover, he must have a good report of them that are without ; lest he fall into reproach, and the snare of the devil."

3. Decided predilection of the work. This is considered fundamental. "If any man desire the office of a bishop, (a pastor certainly, not a prelate,) he desireth a good work." The original word translated "desire," is very emphatic. It signifies to desire earnestly, to covet, to long for. Now it is true that men may desire the pastoral office from wrong motives, especially in a community where it is held in honor, amply supported, and associated with literary ease and

distinction, rather than with reproach, poverty, toil and self-denial. But to desire it for its own sake; to love it for the nature of the employment itself, for its spirituality, piety, usefulness, and aids to progress in seeking personal perfection after the image of Christ; to be willing, under the most unfavorable circumstances, and as one of a "sect everywhere spoken against," to labor and suffer, live and die, in this work, as infinitely the most precious of all human employments; this appears to me, other essential qualifications being understood, to indicate the man whom God has inwardly called and moved to take it upon him.

4. A solemn sense of obligation. I believe this is usually associated with the other spiritual qualifications I have named. Perhaps it is, however, a subsequent feeling, arising from much reflection, patient self-examination, and prayer for divine direction in relation to this point. Yet, unless this is felt, unless it becomes a matter of conscience, as well as of desire, it seems not to come up to the scriptural standard. Paul felt himself a debtor both to the Greeks and to the barbarians, both to the wise and to the unwise, to preach the gospel to them to the utmost of his power. And I can hardly conceive of any one as spiritually qualified for this great work, without a similar feeling of solemn obligation, a feeling which utters itself in the awful words of the apostle, "Necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me if I preach not the gospel."

To these spiritual qualifications must be added others, also required by the New Testament, which are more properly INTELLECTUAL. These are four--genius, knowledge, skill, energy.

1. Genius. Let no one be startled by this term in such a connection. I claim genius as an essential attribute for the Christian ministry, and I mean to vindicate the exalted claim. In the use of the word I include both the ideas usually associated with it, namely, superior mental power, and that peculiar disposition of the faculties which fits a man to succeed in his chosen employment, I mean by it, what the old writers mean by parts, and modern ones by talent, and what our churches intend when they speak of a man as having a ministerial gift. This, I suppose, is what the apostle Paul intends when he says that to fit a man for the pastoral office he must be "apt to teach." There must be natural, as well as acquired ability. There must be mental power in general, and a certain aptitude, or genius for instruction, in particular, to qualify a man for doing this particular work better than any other. It is precisely this quality which marks out the man whom God designs for this peculiar sphere, just as the fin of a fish, or the wing of a bird, designates in what element it is designed to move. Without this sort of aptitude for his profession, no man will succeed well in it, whether he attempt the elegant or the useful arts; whether he be a poet, a painter, a musician; a farmer, a mechanic, a merchant; a physician, a lawyer, or a statesman. Without something of it, no man can successfully manage a common school: how much less is he qualified for the divine and difficult work of the Christian ministry? A man may be a useful minister without a fine taste, or a brilliant fancy, but not without that ready, practical good sense, which though by some opposed to genius, I think rather to be of the very essence of genius, since it enables a man to combine religious ideas with rapidity, judgment and effect.

Though spiritual qualifications are of higher value in the sight of God than intellectual, yet we trace his wisdom in interdicting from the Christian ministry those whom he has not endowed

with some obvious degree of this peculiar aptitude and power. True genius is commonly characterized by unusual sensibility; the love of solitary study and meditation; a propensity to trace the resemblances, harmonies and analogies of things; to analyze a whole into its several parts, and collect the scattered elements of truth into a comprehensive unity; to watch the processes of cause and effect, and profit by its observations in originating new plans and combinations of its own. It is as often found among the poor as among the rich. It may exist without education; where it does not, no course of education can confer it; but where it does, it will seize with avidity every advantage which education can bestow. Without it, however pious, blameless, eager for the work, or impressed with the idea of obligation, men may be, we are not authorized to think them called of God to the ministry, or to anticipate for them any lasting honor or success. If they unadvisedly venture upon it, as Newton observes, "they soon find themselves unequal to the work; or if self-conceit prevents them from feeling it, their hearers at least are very sensible of it. They often mistake error for truth. They retail scraps and shreds of sentiments, which they pick up from others, and for want of judgment misapply them. They think vociferation is preaching with power, and that to utter every thing that comes upon their minds, without end or side, as we say, without regard to text, context, occasion, or connection, is preaching extempore." Whose observation will not confirm the justice of these remarks? So necessary is it to the work of the ministry, that a man be "apt to teach," that he have pulpit talent: or, in other words, ministerial genius.

2. To genius must be added knowledge. No talent will enable a man to communicate to others what he does not himself possess. The New Testament requires that the minister of the gospel be "a scribe instructed," one whose "lips keep knowledge," one who "gives himself to reading," one who is "able to teach others also." Of the importance of this qualification, I shall have occasion to say more hereafter.

3. To knowledge must be added skill. This is the joint product of instruction, observation, reflection, and practice. And the utmost attainable amount of this fine quality is demanded of the New Testament minister. And with good reason. For not only must he be able to instruct the church with "sound speech that cannot be condemned," but what is yet more difficult, "both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers." Apollos "mightily convinced the Jews" at Corinth, because he himself was "mighty in the scriptures." Paul and Barnabas entered into the synagogue at Iconium, and there "so spake that a great multitude, both of the Jews and also of the Greeks, believed." In preparing his discourses in a spirit of humble dependence, to work with saving effect on the immortal souls of his hearers, a minister ought never to forget that he is an artist of transcendantly the highest order. "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed : rightly dividing the word of truth."

4. The fourth and last intellectual qualification is energy. This includes activity of mind, pastoral industry, moral courage, and holy zeal. Hear Paul: "Be strong in the grace which is in Christ Jesus." "God hath not given as the spirit of fear, but of power." "Stir up the gift of God which is in thee." A bishop must be "vigilant," but vigilance implies energy. He must be "instant in season, and out of season; he must take heed to himself, and to the doctrine, and to all the flock over which the Holy Ghost has made him overseer." He must put them in remembrance,

as well as instruct; charge, as well as exhort; command and entreat, as well as reprove and rebuke; with all authority, as well as with all long-suffering. In short, he must perform a vast variety of duties, each of which demands of him activity of mind and energy of character. "Watch thou in all things; endure afflictions; do the work of an evangelist; make full proof of thy ministry." What human energy is equal to all this!

It is easy to see that to accomplish the work assigned to a minister of the New Testament, no small degree of PHYSICAL, as well as spiritual and intellectual qualification, is required.

1. He needs health. A sort of military hardihood is enjoined upon him. "Endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ." Hence he must rigidly obey the laws of temperance and exercise. He must be "temperate, sober," that is to say, govern not only his appetites, but his passions, which, as Dr. Rush remarks, "pour a constant stream upon the wheels of life." He must take care of his health for the sake of his usefulness; remembering that "the body is for the Lord, and the Lord for the body." Thus Paul, "I keep under my body and bring it into subjection, lest by any means when I have preached to others I myself should be a cast-away." "He that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. And they do it for a corruptible crown; but we for an incorruptible."

2. He needs also habits of order. "God is not the author of confusion." He has assigned to every duty its time and place, and made everything beautiful in its season. By not attending to this arrangement of divine wisdom, by neglecting that great law of order which pervades all the works of God, how much time is lost — how much talent, temper, labor, comfort, harmony, success!

3. Politeness is also required of him. In its profound attention to motives, the New Testament does not overlook manners; for in the eye of the world at least, which we seek to save, "manners make the man." Hence Christians in general are bidden to be kind, gentle, courteous. And it is expressly required as a ministerial qualification, that a man be "of good behavior," or as the word employed literally signifies, "polite;" attentive to the laws of good breeding; careful to correct ungainly manners; cultivating on Christian principles, and exemplifying in every company, benevolence, affability, modesty, simplicity, grace, dignity, ease.

4. Eloquence is the last qualification of this order. I speak of it here as a physical accomplishment merely, for the Christian ministry. It is called in the New Testament, "the gift of utterance." On its importance, in connection with other qualifications, intellectual and spiritual, I need not enlarge, as it is sufficiently obvious to all. Although Paul disclaims that "excellency of speech," that rhetorical artifice, refinement, flourish and embellishment, so much applauded in the degenerate schools of Greece, and relied on by the sophists and false teachers of the age, yet, he is far from despising, indeed he is continually exemplifying, every real, unaffected, manly excellence of style and composition. At Lystra, in Asia Minor, he was even mistaken by the enthusiastic people for the god of eloquence incarnate. The eloquence of Apollon is celebrated by inspired men. How much more do they love to dwell on the superhuman eloquence of Him who was fairer than the children of men, into whose lips grace was poured,

and to whom all bare witness, as they hung on his gracious words. "Never man spake like this man." Paul even entreates the prayers of the churches, "that utterance might be given to him;" nor can anyone who has remarked how much the effect of the most important sentiments depends upon the manner in which they are delivered, deem this a prayer unworthy of the great apostle. Defects of elocution capable of being remedied, should therefore never be tolerated in himself by a minister of the gospel, since they seldom are tolerated by his hearers; and by inspiring unnecessary disgust, bring neglect or contempt upon his all-important message.

Such then is the high standard of ministerial qualification required,"¹ I do not say by the Baptist churches of Virginia, but by that Sovereign Head of the Christian church, whom the Baptist churches of Virginia recognize and adore. How does it rebuke that low estimate of ministerial gifts and acquirements, which too generally prevails among us all! How should we tremble before God, in view of our manifold deficiencies, —intellectual, physical, and spiritual! By what diligence in study, in practice, and in prayer, should we seek incessantly to have our faults corrected, and our deficiencies supplied!

Our object as an Education Society, I have already said, is to aid our young brethren in the ministry to come up to the scriptural standard. I proceed now briefly to speak of the character of the means we employ for this end.

II. The means we employ.

It is obvious, on a moment's reflection, that there is not one of the ministerial qualifications enumerated above, which is not susceptible of cultivation. It is equally evident from the language already quoted from the New Testament, that God requires them to be cultivated, and this to the utmost possible extent. And this is equally true, whether we look at the spiritual, the intellectual, or the physical. It is manifest that piety may be strengthened; character elevated; esteem of the office enhanced; and the sense of obligation and responsibility deepened. So too, genius may be developed; knowledge extended; skill acquired; energy awakened and increased. Even health may be invigorated; habits of order established; manners softened into simplicity and gentleness; and elocution made natural, easy, appropriate and impressive. On what other principle did Paul say to Timothy, "Meditate on these things; give thyself wholly to them; that thy profiting may appear unto all?" All this may be accomplished by education, wherever the stamina of ministerial talent exist. For it may, I think, be laid down as a universal maxim, that every man who is "apt to teach," is still more apt to learn.

"By what sort of artifice," says the late Dr. Mason, of New York, "do men cozen their understandings into such argumentation as this? Talent without education is better than stupidity with it, therefore talent ought not to be educated! Here is a colt of excellent points and mettle; he is worth a dozen of your dull, blundering jades, that have been in harness ever since they were able to draw, therefore, he will do very well without breaking! It is surprising that so many otherwise discreet persons, will maintain that to be wise and good in the church of God, which they know to be absurd and mischievous in everything else. In fact, talent,

instead of being exempted from the necessity of cultivation, is alone worth the trouble, and needs cultivation in proportion to its strength.—No talent can coin facts ; and without facts, it will run to waste. Without information, it has no material to work upon; and without discipline, it will work wrong. The power of doing evil, is in exact proportion to the power of doing good. Petty minds produce petty harms and petty benefits. The errors of powerful minds are great errors, and draw after them deep and lasting consequences. It is of unutterable moment that they be set right in the beginning."

Were it necessary to adduce examples in confirmation of these remarks of Dr. Mason, we could point to the errors of such great men as Origen, Cyprian, Pelagius, Jerome and Augustine, in the ancient church; and in more modern times, of Bernard, Loyola and Bossuet, in the Romish church ; of Socinus, Priestley and Channing, among Protestants; to say nothing of Baron Swedenberg, Professor Bush, or Alexander Campbell. What would have become of such a powerful mind as that of Robert Hall, independent and erratic in all its early tendencies, but for the discipline afforded him by means of the Bristol Education Society, first in their own Academy, and afterwards in the University of Aberdeen? Happy had it been for John Foster, perhaps the most original and the mightiest intellect of the nineteenth century, could he have enjoyed the benefit, not of one brief year at Bristol, but of the full course pursued by his excellent tutor and friend, Joseph Hughes, the immortal founder of the British and Foreign Bible Society. We might then, probably, have been spared the sad anomaly of his great error on future punishment, which gathered, with some of inferior magnitude, around the matchless, mental luminary, like dark spots in the splendor of the sun.

It is true we are sometimes asked, what had education to do with the qualifications of Christ's first ministers? We answer—first, it takes years of study now to put a young man on a level, in point of biblical knowledge, with the uneducated fishermen of Galilee. But this is not all. They were three or four years in the most perfect theological seminary in the world, trained under the daily instructions and personal care of Christ himself. And then, after all this, they were endued with miraculous "power from on high." "It is with the worst possible grace that we are referred to the apostles as patterns of an *illiterate ministry*, when the Holy Ghost was at the pains to teach them by *miracle*, things of which we are confidently told the Christian ministry has no need whatever."

It seems too often to be taken for granted that the Christian pastor has nothing to do in his official instructions, but to teach the simplest doctrines of the gospel, in the simplest forms. But this is a false supposition. It confounds the work of the pastor with that of the evangelist. It overlooks the apostolic distinction between "milk" and "strong meat;" between the wants of spiritual infancy and spiritual maturity. Its tendency is to keep the church in a state of perpetual childhood; in direct opposition to the revealed design of her great Head, in the institution of the pastoral office. Ephs. 4:12-16. God has charged his people to "leave the first principles of the doctrine of Christ, and go on unto perfection," as the workmen leave the foundations of the building, when once broadly and firmly laid, in order to carry up the superstructure to its full height, in all the strength, majesty and beauty of its original plan and harmonious proportions.

The human intellect was formed to be the treasury of divine truth. The requisition of the moral law (often overlooked) is, that we love our God with *all our understanding* as well as with all our heart, and soul, and strength. And with reason. For of any object fervently loved, we are always anxious to increase our knowledge. And every increase of knowledge, when the object is woithy, adds new impulse and ardor to our affections.

Ignorance of divine truth was, therefore, originally the offspring of sin. It is now a terrible part of the curse consequent on man's apostacy. Hence sinners are represented as *alienated from the life of God, through the ignorance that is in them*. And hence Christians are said in regeneration to be *renewed in knowledge*, well as in righteousness and true holiness. Hence also, they are called *children of light*, and are commanded to *walk in the light*. Having tasted the sweets of sanctified intelligence, they are to thirst and struggle for more; having caught a glimpse of the glory of God; they are to *follow on to know him*, especially as reveal-ed in his Son, Jesus Christ, that they may obtain a more comprehensive view, a clearer perception, a more intimate knowledge, a more lively relish, and a more exquisite enjoyment.

Such injunctions are worthy of God — of Him who is emphatically light, and in whom is no darkness at all — of Him who is the original centre, sun and source of all truth, natural and moral, human and divine — of Him who is infinitely worthy of being known, admired and adored, in all the exhibitions of his character, whether those already made, or those which he is continually making, in the magnificent system of Creation, Providence and Redemption.

But if it be the will of God that all his people should obtain so enlarged a knowledge of himself, what degree, think you, would He that his chosen ministers should possess? If He charged his whole family to acquire such ample stores of sacred truth, what treasures would He have those acquire who are to be the instructors of his family? What lights should irradiate those who are to be the light of the world? What riches should they amass who are to enrich the church of God?

Learning, then, so far from being inconsistent with the genius of the gospel, is not only sanctioned, but enjoined by it. The spirit of the ministry is eminently the spirit of knowledge. How is it possible for us to love truth too fervently? How can we be too intimately acquainted with those subjects which it is our duty and glory to publish fully, plainly, and faithfully, to our fellow-men? Who can doubt the will of God that every one of his ambassadors, charged to negotiate between God and man the great affairs of an eternal salvation, should labor to qualify himself to the utmost, and by all means, to discharge his appropriate duties with a dignity, wisdom, and success, that may put to shame the low intrigues of cabinets and the petty diplomacy of statesmen? And who can doubt but that in order to this, every minister, especially if in the pastoral office, should feel a deep, well-grounded conviction of the truth and worth of Christianity — that he should be thoroughly acquainted with the doctrine, spirit, worship, ordinances, order and discipline of the New Testament — and that he should know the best methods of unfolding, illustrating, defending and recommending these to the people of his charge, with all their diversities of character, age, sex, talents, attainments, relations, conditions, necessities, prejudices?

But how is he to attain these qualifications? They are not all born with him. Neither are they communicated in his second birth—nor in his subsequent call to the ministry—nor by immediate inspiration from heaven in the hour of ordinary need, when he rises in the pulpit to do the work of an evangelist or to feed the flock of God. Thousands of sermons are preached every Sabbath which demonstrate this by most disastrous experiment. Notwithstanding all that has been done for him, then, by nature, by grace, and by divine commission, the Christian minister now, like Timothy of old, must study. He must meditate on these things. Like the wise royal preacher of a still earlier age, he must search out and set in order the messages of divine wisdom. He must not even disdain to seek out acceptable words, provided always that his words are *upright*, even the words of truth.

Can any man acquire a strong sense of ministerial duty, without studying the duties appropriate to his sacred profession? Can he steadily maintain the devotion of the heart, but by prayer, springing faith and meditation, nourished by the word of God? Can he obtain a deep, well-grounded conviction of the truth and worth of Christianity, in any other way than by studying its admirable adaptations to the wants of the human soul, and its bright array of evidence, external, internal, experimental and analogical? Can he acquire a thorough knowledge of the scriptures in any other way than by searching them daily—by studying them, if possible, like the primitive preachers, in their inspired original—by acquainting himself with the fundamental elements of biblical interpretation—by availing himself of the ripest fruits of criticism, commentary, and systematic arrangement, and historical development, collected by the labors of others in this ample field, that he may keep up with the progress of the human mind, and meet with manly decision the demands of his own place and age?

But you say, all ministers of the gospel cannot do this, for they have not the requisite means, and are altogether unable to obtain them. True—And for that very reason, it is no just impeachment of their character. Let them only do what they can. It is not required of them to perform impossibilities. But this I venture to say of such men; that where they possess the spirit of their office, there you will see them grieving over the scantiness of their Biblical knowledge, and the poverty of their intellectual resources,—thirsting for truth, and sighing to think, that where the wells of salvation are so pure, so fresh, so deep, they should be, for lack of knowledge, unable to draw. Who can despise such ministers because they are not learned? Rather let them be honored for the diligent use which they make of the means afforded. If there be first a willing mind, it is accepted, according to what a man hath.

Yet would any of you wish a minister of Christ to be in such circumstances, if it can be avoided? If he is a teacher, should not his acquisitions and resources be at least superior to those of the people who are to be taught by him? And is it light for the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth, whose duty it is to maintain her ministers, that they may give themselves wholly to the work of their high calling, to leave them without the means of improvement in their studies, by which, and by which alone, their profiting may appear unto all?

It cannot be. The Sovereign Head of the church has fully intimated his will on this point. He has made it the duty of his ministers to study; and he has made it the duty of his people to maintain them while thus employed. Let us hold fast these great maxims of the Bible through the whole of our subsequent observations.

It is the duty of ministers of the gospel to study. But study demands books, time, thought, application. These are expensive. Should not the churches then, who are to reap the fruit of all this study, be willing to defray the expense? Clearly it is the dictate of equity and wisdom.

Now there are three ways in which study can be pursued; either alone, or with a private tutor, or at a public school. Which of these should be preferred? It is of importance that we determine this question well. The stability and growth of the churches are at stake.

It is clear that a minister already settled has no choice. The first is the only course which, generally speaking, he can pursue. It is otherwise with our young ministers, just entering into their great work. To them a choice is open. To them the first course is full of obvious disadvantages,—which only the force of a mind like that of John Bunyan or Andrew Fuller has been able to overcome, and then by unparalleled exertions. Shall a young minister then turn to the second, and pursue his studies with a private tutor? Doubtless he will be greatly aided by the guiding example, cheering voice and helping hand of such an instructor; yet there is still a more excellent way. Not that there may not be found men of learning and piety, men of deep thought and high theological attainment, in whose families and libraries great facilities may be found for the prosecution of study; but that one man is not equal to many—that a man engaged in many other avocations, cannot devote himself to teaching like those who make it their only avocation—that a private library is not so extensive and varied and valuable as a public library—and finally, that a young minister in that situation is not only often, but also overpoweringly tempted to exchange the character of the profound and diligent student for that of the agreeable, but superficial companion. With very few exceptions, all experience decides against private, in favor of public tuition. Many are the young ministers who having commenced a private course, have felt compelled to abandon it for the sake of a more free and full and finished education at a public institution.

The advantages of larger and better selected libraries; of instructors chosen and approved by the churches; of association with kindred minds in kindred pursuits; the mutual aids, the lasting friendships, the future harmony of action, as well as unity of faith, thus secured, are not easily estimated. In a word, a public school, as compared with private tuition, is no less scriptural, being sanctioned by the example of Christ and his apostles; it is more economical, more social, more happy, more efficient; and inasmuch as other denominations around us are now agreed in giving such advantages to their rising ministry, it is manifest that duty to our own, and to the cause of truth committed to our hands as a denomination, demands of us a universal, steady and generous support of those institutions of learning established among ourselves.

III. Little space remains for me to enforce the importance of this great duty of our churches and of our age. I must sum up a few considerations in a brief closing appeal.

Look around you then, my dear brethren. Among the manifold indications of providence, by which God reveals his will, and determines the duties of his servants, can ye not discern the signs of the times?

Think of the state of the world, and especially of the circumstances of our own country. Think of the general advancement of society — the progress of science and art — the diffusion of popular education — the demand for teachers of the highest order of attainment — and tell me if all this rapid advancement and prodigious activity of mind, has no relative bearing on the qualifications and success of the Christian ministry. It were madness to doubt it. Has not Virginia suffered already by our failing as a denomination to meet the just demands of the age, by a higher culture, and wider intellectual grasp in the pulpit? Doubtless we want more piety, but we want more knowledge too.

Our age is an age of conflict. Probably, indeed, we stand on the very verge of that final conflict of the church, called the battle of the great day of God Almighty, If the pulpit and the press are to decide the issues of that day, are we fully armed to do our part? When the enemy comes in like a flood — when old exploded errors are revived in new forms of enchantment, like Jannes and Jambres to withstand the truth of God — when infidelity attempts to supplant vital Christianity, by seizing on the powers of science, and the graces of a seductive literature, will the Spirit of the Lord suffer us to sleep, while heaven lifts up the standard of the holy war?

Think, again, my brethren, of the claims of the missionary enterprise, and of its kindred institutions of benevolence in our times. Behold the Board of a Southern Convention, located in this very city, and sending out its selected agents, not only to enlighten the darkness of Africa, but to grapple hand to hand with the philosophical Pantheism of Foh, and the polished skepticism of Confucius, in the literary circles of China. In this great work can we dispense with the service of disciplined and cultivated mind? Give us Peter and James and John; they are all needed; but we want Paul and Apollos also.

Finally, think, my brethren, of our own country,— its progress, character and destiny. With a vast and fertile territory, capable of supporting eight times the population that now dwells on the face of the whole globe, it is startling to think that even during the lifetime of some who now hear me, she will number as her citizens, a greater multitude of people than the Roman eagle ever overshadowed. Long before that time, indeed, she will hold the balance of power among the nations, and thenceforth, of necessity, sway the destinies of the world. But O! What shall be her own destiny? What the spiritual and eternal destiny of the myriads of her children? Is it certain that Christianity, in its vital power and original purity, will govern their souls, growing with their growth, and strengthening with their strength? We hope so. But let us not forget the existing facts.

Remember that here Christianity rests, as she ought to rest, on her own resources, unaided by the secular arm. Remember that heir all the interests of the country — all that is precious in her free institutions, her morals, her happiness, her hopes, rests on the universal and permanent

ascendancy of the pure and powerful religion of the Cross. As in Judea, in the time of Christ, so now in the United States, the temporal, as well as the eternal happiness, the national existence, as well as the individual welfare of a great people is at stake. Consider the serious and startling fact, that notwithstanding all our advantages — our churches, ministers. Sabbaths, Sabbath schools and revivals, the population of this country, for years, has been actually outgrowing its piety. Converts are not multiplied at the rate of a thousand a day; but to hold good even the present proportion of Christian influence, there should be at least one-third more than that number converted every day in the year. Consider that this painful and alarming fact has a cause: and that cause must be mainly in the defects of the ministry. It is not a deficiency in numbers merely, or chiefly — though this is obviously great — but it is manifestly owing to a still greater deficiency in qualifications such as the word of God requires, to meet the peculiar exigencies of our age. The twelve apostles, and the primitive ministers generally, were better qualified intellectually, as well as spiritually, than we are, — they were thoroughly adapted to their times, — and consequently were far more efficient agents under God in reconciling the world to himself by Jesus Christ. Fewer in number — in a sphere far more extensive, and far more difficult, the vast measure of their success is the best measure of our sad deficiency.

My dear brethren, I can say no more. I sink under the awful weight of this single reflection, and ask you what more is necessary to enforce the great object for which I plead. It is to remedy this defect in the rising ministry, that the Virginia Baptist Education Society is established. It is to avert the appalling evils that threaten our beloved country and the never-dying souls of men. It is to fill the whole earth with the knowledge of the Lord, and, train immortal beings everywhere, through the gospel and the grace of God, for the perfect happiness of heaven. With these great ends in view, to raise the standard of ministerial qualification to its scriptural elevation, surely must be our united, earnest, generous, prayerful, persevering aim.

You have heard us. It is now time to judge. God grant that you may judge righteous judgment for his Son's sake. Amen.